

**Who Was Mariam Sageaser? A Student's Investigation into her Alleged Heritage**

**An Honors Thesis (HIST 440)**

**By**

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## Abstract

Many Americans believe that they have Native ancestry. Through recent developments in DNA testing we are able to prove that in many instances, this is not actually the case. This fallacy is known as The Cherokee Princess Myth, as most often the claim of Native ancestry is that a great-great grandmother was a Cherokee Princess. This claim is impossible in and of itself as there is no Princess in Native customs. I take the reader on my own journey of discovery in attempting to find the truth behind this myth in my family tree.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Bruce Geelhoed for advising me through this project. His encouragement has made this daunting task more bearable.

I would like to thank Kay Rhodus for encouraging a love of my past and telling me all of the stories that led to this project. Also, for traveling with me to all of the locations I needed to visit for this project.

I would like to thank Julie Mooney for giving me access to her tools.

And lastly, I would like to thank the generations before me, Carrie, Pearl, Susan, and Mariam, for giving me a story to tell.

One of my favorite memories of growing up is playing with the rocks that my Grandmother kept on a bookshelf in her back room. I played with them just to hear the story. The rocks were actually Native American tools. There were eight tools of various sizes. All are handheld and include both grinding and cutting tools. The smallest ones are similar to arrowheads, but more rounded. They are of different types of stone, both rough and smooth. One even appears to have some writing on it.<sup>1</sup> What fascinated me the most, though, was that these tools had been used by people in our family, and that they were the only types of tools available to them. This seems unfathomable as this particular ancestor lived in the 1800s, a time when much more advanced tools should have been available.

I was always told that the tools had been handed down through the generations from my Great-Great-Great Grandmother, Mariam Sageser Tevebaugh, who was a Shawnee Indian.<sup>2</sup> Last year, my family happened to be discussing Mariam and my Aunt mentioned that she always heard Mariam was a “Cherokee Princess.” At this point, I became suspicious of the story, knowing that the Cherokee tribe inhabited areas too far to the south to be our ancestors and also that there are no such princesses in Native American customs. At the time, I decided that this must have been a derogatory term that she was called for marrying a white man and I dismissed the story. The mystery became much more interesting, however, with the results of a DNA test

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<sup>1</sup> Native American stone tools. Privately held by Julie Mooney, Amelia, Ohio.

<sup>2</sup> Kay Rhodus. *Sageser/ Tevebaugh Family Stories*. Interview by author. February 7, 2016.

which determines ethnicity. My results showed that I am not Native American in any way.<sup>3</sup> At this point, I became determined to discover the identity of this mystery woman. I wanted to know how the story began that she was a Native American and, more importantly, from where the Native American artifacts in my Grandmother's back room actually came.

The aim of this paper is to answer these questions, and possibly more which will arise. I will do this through a detailed study of the life of Mariam Sageser Tevebaugh using any record of her life that I have been able to find over a four month period of investigation.<sup>4</sup>

Mary Ann Sageser was born on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1817 in Fayette County, Kentucky to Henry and Sarah Sageser<sup>5</sup>. She was the fifth of fourteen children. It appears that she had a comfortable childhood. The family was very wealthy and even owned one slave, a girl named Diner.<sup>6</sup> When Mary Ann was still a child, the family moved to Bourbon County, Kentucky and here, became close with the Jacob Tevebaugh family.<sup>7</sup> There are various legal documents over the year which show Jacob and Henry's interactions, including purchases, sales, and joint ventures of the two

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<sup>3</sup> *Ancestry DNA Ethnicity Estimate for Carrie Rhodus*. <http://dna.ancestry.com/ethnicity/6985BB2D-8E4E-40FD-991B-AA1EA2BA9FB7> (accessed January 17, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Given time and travel constraints, there are still some holes in the story, such as time spent in Missouri.

<sup>5</sup> There is some debate to the year. Her death certificate lists the birth year as 1816, however any time that the family has mentioned the year it is always 1817. As I was unable to find her birth certificate, I chose to use the family given year for the purposes of this paper. It is also possible that she could have been born in Bourbon County, as the family moved here around that time. There are not any definitive records as to the location for those two years, with the earliest record of the Sageser Family in Bourbon County being the 1820 Census.

<sup>6</sup> Purchase records for land in Bourbon County show Henry paying \$1,178.50 for his new land. This is equivalent to \$20,149.68 today. 1830 United States Census (Population Schedule), Bourbon County, Kentucky; Page: 357; Line 13; National Archives Microfilm; M19; Roll: 33.

<sup>7</sup> Osee Johnson Knouf and John Russell Segeser, Jr. *Sageser Genealogy: Descendants of Jacob Sageser whose will was probated on August 6, 1821 in Fayette County, Kentucky* (Decorah, IA: Anundsen Publishing, 1978), 105.

men.<sup>8</sup> The families became so close, that Mary Ann even married one of the Tevebaugh sons, John. They were married on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1836. It is interesting to note that at this time, we see the name change of Mary Ann to Mariam.<sup>9</sup>

It appears that Mariam married up. Jacob Tevebaugh owned slightly more than 589 acres just south of Paris, Kentucky.<sup>10</sup> John was the second of eight children and, more importantly, the first male child.<sup>11</sup> This means that he probably had the most advantages of the children and inherited the most financially as well. In addition to owning nine slaves, the inventory for Jacob's Will shows his estate being valued at \$7331.90, or \$175,701.35 today.<sup>12</sup> This is substantially more than the Sageser family was worth. However, it is interesting that John and Mariam seemed to have more contact with the Sageser side of the family.

Also in 1836, Henry Sageser bought 220 acres in Rush County, Indiana and sold his property in Bourbon County.<sup>13</sup> The entire family appears to have followed him to this new home

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<sup>8</sup> Bourbon County Land Records, 1825-1827, 43, 186, Clerk of the Court, Bourbon County Courthouse, Paris, Kentucky.

<sup>9</sup> Certificate of Marriage, John Tevebaugh to Mariam Sageser, 11 February 1836, Bourbon County, Kentucky. Clerk of the Court, Paris, Kentucky. This change in name could have happened as John already had a mother and sister named Mary Ann. Mariam could have been a sort of nickname in order to distinguish between the three.

<sup>10</sup> John L. Tevebaugh and Patricia Lou Thummel, *The Tevebaughs- Kentucky Branch: The Descendants of Jacob Tevebaugh and Mary Magdalene Welton*, (Muskegon, Michigan: Published by the Authors, 2002), p. vii

<sup>11</sup> Tevebaugh and Thummel, *The Tevebaughs- Kentucky Branch*, p. 1

<sup>12</sup> 1830 United States Census (Population Schedule), Bourbon County, Kentucky; Page: 357; Line 4; National Archives Microfilm; M19; Roll: 33. Jacob Tevebaugh, Will, Bourbon County Will Book, 1840-1841, L, Volume 1, pages 205-206, 223-225, Clerk of the Court, Bourbon Courthouse, Paris, Kentucky. Also, Will Book 1840-1841, M, Volume 1, Page 1.

<sup>13</sup> Osee Johnson Knouf and John Russell Segeser, Jr. *Sageser Genealogy: Decendants of Jacob Sageser whose will was probated on August 6, 1821 in Fayette County, Kentucky* (Decorah, IA: Anundsen Publishing, 1978), 105.

by 1850, including John and Mariam.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the event which brought them all together to Indiana was Henry's death. On November 29, 1839, Henry was killed in a tree felling accident.<sup>15</sup> The twelve children who were still living at the time all had to come to Rush County several times over the next several years until the estate was finally settled in 1851.<sup>16</sup> It seems at this point with the division of land to each of the children, it may have just been easier to move to the area. For Mariam and John, Rush County must not have been quite what they wanted, as by 1860 they had again moved, this time to Johnson County, Indiana.<sup>17</sup>

As far as I can tell, they seemed to be a "normal" family in the community. They are listed as farmers, as were all of their relatives and ancestors. They seem to have been wealthy, both families owned large properties and slaves. John's ledger book lists several trips throughout the year to visit Sageser family in various parts of Indiana, as well as records of transactions for his farm production. They seemed to be doing well, with Mariam even bringing in her own money.<sup>18</sup> Yet somehow, in the course of the next ten years, everything went awry and the family fell apart.

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<sup>14</sup> 1850 United States Census (Population Schedule), District Number 97, Rush County, Indiana; p. 22, family 155, dwelling 155, lines 14-19; August 12, 1850. Copy in possession of author. This census shows the youngest child, John, as being one and born in Kentucky, making the move to Indiana fairly recent.

<sup>15</sup> Knouf and Segeser, Jr. *Sageser Genealogy*, p. 104.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Sageser, Estate, Rush County Complete Record Probate Book, 1851-1852, 8, Clerk of the Courts, Rush County Courthouse, Rushville, Indiana.

<sup>17</sup> 1860 United States Census (Population Schedule), Nineveh Township, Johnson County, Indiana; p. 90, family 659, dwelling 667, lines 24-30; August 3, 1860. Copy in possession of author. This is one of the rare instances after their marriage when her name is listed as Mary Ann.

<sup>18</sup> Leather bound book. John Tevebaugh etched in cover. In possession of the author.



In 1870, Mariam and her youngest daughter, Elizabeth, were living with her son, Jacob, and his family in Nineveh Township.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, John was living with Mariam's brother, William, and his family in Cass County, Indiana.<sup>20</sup> The remaining three children were scattered in the two counties, working for other families. Sarah and Susan were domestic servants and John worked at the sawmill.<sup>21</sup> From this time on, the family was always separated. I do not know exactly what happened, but it appears that it was something traumatic which ripped apart the family.

Mariam seems to have done the most traveling, living with various family members for the next several years. Family letters dated 1875 and 1877 indicate that Mariam went with her son, Garrett, to live in Pettis County, Missouri and allude to the fact that she was widowed.<sup>22</sup> However, John did not die until February 11, 1881.<sup>23</sup> In the 1880 census, both Mariam and John are listed as widowed, even though both were still alive and living with family. John was living in Clermont County, Ohio with their daughter, Susan. Mariam was living with her niece in

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<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth died here on March 4th of the following year but was buried in the Tevebaugh family cemetery in Bourbon County, Kentucky. This is quite unusual and it was an expensive undertaking to ship her body. This is one aspect of the story which I do not fully understand. 1870 United States Census (Population Schedule), Nineveh Township, Johnson County, Indiana; p. 98, family 251, dwelling 251, lines 14-18; August 13, 1870. Copy in possession of author.

<sup>20</sup> 1870 United States Census (Population Schedule), Washington Township, Cass County, Indiana; p. 187, family 20, dwelling 20, lines 33-37, July 16, 1870. Copy in possession of author.

<sup>21</sup> 1870 United States Census (Population Schedule), Deer Creek Township, Cass County, Indiana; p. 64/4, family 23, dwelling 23, lines 8-13; July 4, 1870. Copy in possession of author. 1870 United States Census (Population Schedule), Deer Creek Township, Cass County, Indiana; p. 64/4, family 26, dwelling 26, lines 21-27; July 4 1870. Copy in possession of author. 1870 United States Census (Population Schedule), Nineveh Township, Johnson County, Indiana; p. 106, family 313, dwelling 313, lines 1-7; August 20, 1870. Copy in possession of author.

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that some of the Tevebaugh relatives also moved to Pettis County, Missouri. Knouf and Segeser, Jr. *Sageser Genealogy*, p. 125

<sup>23</sup> Record of Death for John Tevebaugh, 11 February 1881, Book 23, Page 410-411, Clermont County Clerk of the Court, Batavia, Ohio.

Morgan County, Indiana.<sup>24</sup> My first thought upon finding this is that perhaps they were divorced. However there are no divorce records in the state of Indiana or Ohio with names that could possibly be John and Mariam Tevebaugh. I still believe that they were formally separated, if not divorced. This brings about more questions; namely, what caused them to separate and claim each other as dead?

This matter is further complicated by Mariam's location in 1900.<sup>25</sup> Mariam was living in the Home for the Friendless in Logansport, Indiana. She is listed as having four living children, one of whom is Susan, my Great-Great Grandmother.<sup>26</sup> Several of Mariam's Sageser relatives also lived in the area, some of whom even came to visit her at the home.<sup>27</sup> The question this raises is: Why was she not living with one of her children at this time? This question is even more concerning as I was always told that Mariam died sometime in the 1860s. This information comes directly from my Great Grandmother, Pearl, who was Susan's daughter.<sup>28</sup> This leads me to believe that Susan most likely told Pearl that this was when her mother died. Because it appears that Mariam and John's separation occurred around the time of her supposed death, this leads me to believe that Susan took her father's side in the separation and also considered her

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<sup>24</sup> 1880 United States Census (Population Schedule), Monroe Township, Clermont County, Ohio; p. 174, family 217, dwelling 208, lines 19-22; June 10, 1880. Copy in possession of author. 1880 United States Census (Population Schedule), Harrison Township, Morgan County, Indiana; p. 13, family 24, dwelling 24, lines 23-26; June 3-4, 1880. National Archives Microfilm T9, Roll 301.

<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, there is a fairly large gap in my research as the 1890 Censuses are no longer in existence.

<sup>26</sup> 1900 United States Census (Population Schedule), Logansport, Ward 4, Eel Township, Cass County, Indiana, p. 3, family 75, dwelling 78, house number 360; June 4, 1900; National Archives Microfilm T623, Roll 362.

<sup>27</sup> Knouf and Segeser, Jr. *Sageser Genealogy*, p. 125

<sup>28</sup> Kay Rhodus. Sageser/ Tevebaugh Family Stories. Interview by author. February 7, 2016.



mother as dead to her. This theory is further developed by the fact that John lived with Susan for at least a year before his death.

Mariam was first listed as living in the Home for the Friendless in 1897.<sup>29</sup> She remained there until her death on June 18, 1907. A funeral was held at the Home and she was buried in a single plot with a very simple headstone stating only her name, birth year, and death year.<sup>30</sup> Based on the simplicity and location, it seems that the Home gave her this burial. Knowing that at least three of her children were still living at the time, it seems odd that they did not give her a proper burial in a family plot.

My best attempts to answer these questions are mere speculation based on the evidence that I have gathered, as well as the stories which I have heard. Based on the fact that Susan told Pearl that her mother died in the 1860s, I feel that the most important aspect of the story is to discern what caused Susan to have such negative feelings toward her mother, or why she was falsely informed that her mother had died.

In the 1860 Census, Susan was listed as being seven.<sup>31</sup> Because of this, she seems to have been old enough to remember her mother and the separation and it seems harder to convince her that her mother had died. Also because of the fact the Mariam was living with Susan's brothers, Jacob and Garrett, during the 1870s, I feel that she would have been in contact with her family

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<sup>29</sup> Logansport, Indiana, City Directory, 1897, p. 98

<sup>30</sup> Miriam Tevebaugh obituary, Logansport, Indiana, Logansport Daily Reporter, 20 June 1907, p. 4, col. 4. Mt. Hope Cemetery (Logansport, Cass County, Indiana), Mariam Tevebaugh headstone, photographed by the author, March 25, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> 1860 United States Census (Population Schedule), Nineveh Township, Johnson County, Indiana; p. 90, family 659, dwelling 667, line 29; August 3, 1860. Copy in possession of author.

and thus known about her mother's living conditions. I can perhaps see some resentment building at this time, as Susan was a domestic servant for a family that was very far away from her own. This time was her teenage years, so it seems that she was just starting to enjoy their life of luxury when it was ripped away from her.<sup>32</sup> I can imagine that this feeling was made worse by the fact that there was a surplus of relatives nearby, who still had large amounts of money. There is evidence of the discrepancy in affluence of different members of the Sageser family,<sup>33</sup> most of whom lived in Cass or Rush County during this time. This was probably made even harder by the fact that around the same time a collection was taken up among the "well-to-do sisters in Indiana" for her Aunt Emily.<sup>34</sup> I can imagine any teenager wondering why nothing was being done to help her out of her poor situation while other members of the family were given things. It is very possible that she became disillusioned with the Sageser side of her family, which could have led to her unwillingness to share family history with her children.

Another factor which could have added to this family tension is Susan's choice of a husband. On August 31, 1875 Susan married Jerome Fitzpatrick.<sup>35</sup> Both of Jerome's parents died in 1867, when he was fifteen. The six children were divided up among relatives and neighbors. As each child became old enough to work, they were sent out to find their own way in life.<sup>36</sup> For

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<sup>32</sup> I do not know with any certainty that the family lost their fortune; however, all records seem to point to this fact as the family has been divided up and forced to take laboring jobs instead of living together on the family farm. From this point on, there are never any more records which indicate that the family did have money, but there is also not definitive proof that they did not. It is very easy to speculate that this loss of fortune had something to do with the Civil War, simply because of the timing. Both the Tevebaugh's and the Sageser's had members in the Confederacy and Union and letters show that the Sageser side was not as friendly after the war. It is also possible that this divide could have had something to do with the family separation, as political opinions could have differed within the family as well.

<sup>33</sup> Knouf and Segeser, Jr. *Sageser Genealogy*, p. 129, 139, 183.

<sup>34</sup> Knouf and Segeser, Jr. *Sageser Genealogy*, p. 139.

<sup>35</sup> Certificate of Marriage, Jerome H. Fitzpatrick to Susan Tevebough, 31 August 1875, Rush County, Indiana. Clerk of the Courts, Rushville, Indiana. Copy in possession of the author. The H stood for Hamer, which is what the family called him. For the sake of ease I will continue to refer to him as Jerome, as this is what all official documents said.

<sup>36</sup> Kay Rhodus. *Sageser/ Tevebaugh Family Stories*. Interview by author. February 7, 2016.

Jerome, this came immediately after his parent's death and he went to Rush County, Indiana to find work.<sup>37</sup> Based on the location of Susan in 1870, it makes sense that they met after this time. Although I cannot find Jerome on the 1870 census, there were some Nichols living very close to the Parkers at this time.<sup>38</sup> It seems to make sense that Susan was either visiting with or working for the Parkers at the same time that Jerome was working for the Nichols and this is how they met.

Even though Susan's family seems to have lost their fortune, I can still imagine that they saw Jerome as being beneath her. Not only was he a very poor orphan who worked as a tenant farmer, but he was also Irish. At this time, Irish were one of the most discriminated ethnicities in America, with the peak of this discrimination occurring around the mid-1850s.<sup>39</sup> Even worse than being poor, Jerome came from a poor, immigrant family. At least the Sageaser's and Tevebaugh's could say that they came from prominent American families, even if they were no longer worth much in material terms. Susan is listed as a member of the Christian Church at Flatrock in Rush County during this time, so it seems that she and Jerome remained in Rush after their marriage.<sup>40</sup> However, by 1880 Jerome and Susan had moved back to his home area. They are listed as living in Monroe Township of Clermont County, Ohio.<sup>41</sup> John was also living with

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<sup>37</sup> We are not sure why he went to Rush County. There are some Fitzpatrick's in the area, however we do not know if they are any relation. It is also interesting to note that the Nichols family (a very prominent neighbor to the Fitzpatrick's) had relatives in Rush County. Based on the other children, I think it is safe to say that Jerome was sent to Rush County to work for one of the Nichols.

<sup>38</sup> 1870 United States Census (Population Schedule) Ripley Township, Rush County, Indiana; p. 28, family 205, dwelling 205, lines 32-33; June 20, 1870. Also p. 29, family 210, dwelling 209, lines 18-21. National Archives Microfilm M593, Roll 356.

<sup>39</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *The Irish Americans: A History* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008) p. 97-98

<sup>40</sup> Note written by Pearl Wolf, undated, in family papers of Pearl Wolf of Amelia, Ohio; inherited by her daughter-in-law Carrie Wolf of Amelia, Ohio; in possession of Carrie Wolf.

<sup>41</sup> 1880 United States Census (Population Schedule) Monroe Township, Clermont County, Ohio; p. 25, family 217, dwelling 208, lines 19-30; June 10, 1880. Copy in possession of the author. They are listed as living next door to the Tatman family, which is Jerome's mother's maiden name. Atlases of the area show the Tatman's as owning large tracts of land in the area. It appears that Jerome is living on one of these tracts. Also interesting to note is that

them at this time, and remained so until his death on February 11<sup>th</sup> of the next year. Records indicate that he was ill at the time and walked with a cane. His cause of death is listed as a fracture of the hip, which could have been the reason for the cane as well.<sup>42</sup> It seems that Susan moved her father in with them from where he was living near Logansport, Indiana in order to take care of him. This leads me further to believe that Susan had animosity towards her mother, as she did not do the same for her and instead let her live her final ten years in the Home for the Friendless.

In 1900, Jerome and Susan moved again and were living on a farm in Campbell County, Kentucky. They seem to be doing fairly well, as they had the money for a hired hand on the farm. However, they did rent the farm, meaning that they did not have enough money for the land.<sup>43</sup> One of my mother's theories as to why Susan did not abandon her mother at this time is that she had to take care of her children.<sup>44</sup> However, I do not see this as being a valid reason as the children were eleven and seventeen in 1900. They were old enough to no longer be that big of a problem for Susan.

Family stories also tell me that Jerome and Susan were doing fairly well financially at this time. We know that at some point during the late 1880s and early 1890s Jerome and Susan ran the Henning House, a hotel located in Mt. Orab, Ohio.<sup>45</sup> Also during this time, Jerome owned a tobacco barn next to the railroad track that he rented out for storage to the local farmers.

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Ollie, Jerome's sister is a servant for the family that lives next to the Tatman's. This is probably the family which she was placed into after their parents death, as she was nine when this occurred. Jerome's brother John is also living with Jerome and Susan, and works as a farm hand for them.

<sup>42</sup> Record of Death for John Tevebaugh, 11 February 1881, Book 23, Page 410-411, Clermont County Clerk of the Court, Batavia, Ohio.

<sup>43</sup> 1900 United States Census (Population Schedule) Hayfield Precinct Magisterial District Number 5, Campbell County, Kentucky; p. 17B, family 310, dwelling 305, lines 94-98; June 27, 1900. National Archives Microfilm T623, Roll 513.

<sup>44</sup> Kay Rhodus. Sageser/ Tevebaugh Family Stories. Interview by author. February 7, 2016.

<sup>45</sup> We still have the registration book for 1894 as well as some of the dishes which were used in the hotel.



Apparently, this barn burned down and Jerome was able to reimburse all of the farmers for all that they had in the barn.<sup>46</sup> This means that he was doing fairly well at the time that Mariam needed to be taken care of. This means that money was not an issue in regards to her care, and furthers my argument that Susan and her mother were not on good terms. Another question in the story is that we still have several objects that belonged to the Tevebaugh and Sageser families. It seems to be very unusual that we have them, as Susan was the youngest child living at the time of her parent's deaths. My argument for why we have these objects is that John died while living with Susan and therefore all of the possessions he had with him stayed with her. It also makes sense that Mariam did not have many possessions if she lived in a Home for the Friendless, and thus there were not any to come from her even if Susan and Mariam were on good terms at the time of her death.

Among these objects that have come from the Sageser and Tevebaugh families are the Native American Stone tools which I began this paper by discussing. Another issue is where these tools could have come from, as I do not have any Native American ancestry and thus the stories of Mariam using these tools must be false. There seem to be several possible ways that we could have acquired these tools. I know for a fact that the tools came from Susan, and I feel it is very likely that they were given to her by her parents.<sup>47</sup> Thus, my speculations will focus on how John and Mariam could have gotten the tools. One possibility is through Samuel Henry Sageser, Mariam's brother. Samuel moved to Clay County, Illinois in 1855. This area was still inhabited by Native Americans at the time and a particular group that lived four miles from the farm house

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<sup>46</sup> Kay Rhodus. Sageser/ Tevebaugh Family Stories. Interview by author. February 7, 2016. None of this information can be verified as all records for Brown County, Ohio were destroyed in a Courthouse fire. However, since Pearl was old enough to know what was going on in her life during this time I think that the stories she told were fairly accurate.

<sup>47</sup> Kay Rhodus. Sageser/ Tevebaugh Family Stories. Interview by author. February 7, 2016.



came to visit.<sup>48</sup> It is very possible, and I would even say likely, that these Native Americans gave Samuel some of their tools. Given the amount of traveling Mariam was known to have done to visit family, it is also possible that she visited her brother and got the tools that way, perhaps from the Natives themselves. It is also possible that Samuel could have sent her the tools, or at least some of the smaller ones, with a letter. I do not have knowledge of any correspondence between Samuel and Mariam specifically; however given the amount of correspondence between other members of the family, and the fact that other correspondence to Samuel mentions Mariam,<sup>49</sup> it seems very likely that they exchanged letters as well.

Another possibility is that they came from Logansport, Indiana. During the time that the Sageser's were living near Logansport, the Indiana Agency of the Office of Indian Affairs was located here.<sup>50</sup> It is possible that one of Mariam's family members could have worked here, perhaps even John.<sup>51</sup> These tools could have been something that they collected on the job and brought home for the children, Susan included, to play with. It is also possible that they simply found the tools in the farm fields, and someone happened to think they were important enough to keep and pass down through the ages.<sup>52</sup> This seems to me the most likely possibility, and can apply at any point in my ancestry, not just through Mariam and John.

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<sup>48</sup> Knouf and Segeser, Jr. *Sageser Genealogy*, p. 184

<sup>49</sup> Knouf and Segeser, Jr. *Sageser Genealogy*, p. 125

<sup>50</sup> Edward E. Hill *The Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880: historical sketches*, (New York, New York: Clearwater Publishing Company, 1974).

<sup>51</sup> I was unable to look at the records for the Office as they are only available for viewing at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. The Logansport library, courthouse, and historical society have very limited information regarding the Office, and this did not include any type of information in regards to those who worked for the Office.

<sup>52</sup> While inquiring about the Native Americans in Logansport, there was a woman who told me that she has family that still frequently finds tools in their fields today. I can only imagine how much more frequent this was during the time that Mariam and John lived in the area.

There are many other possibilities and quite frankly, anything is possible, however I feel that these are the most relevant and likely. One other possibility which I explored is that perhaps they were purchased by Pearl, after hearing stories that her grandma was a Native American and looking for a way to feel closer to the grandmother she never met and the ancestry she had.<sup>53</sup>

This brings me back to my original question and reason for writing this paper.<sup>54</sup> Where did Pearl get the idea that her grandmother was a Native American? Once again, there are several possibilities which I will examine, all of which are speculation. I was unable to find anything that specifically points to this misinformation. Supposedly, Pearl told the story that her grandmother was a "Cherokee Princess." My mother questioned this, as the Cherokee tribe was not far enough north to where she thought these ancestors lived.<sup>55</sup> She is the one who decided that Mariam was actually a Shawnee, the story that I always heard. My mother also claims that she never heard the princess part, just that Mariam was a member of the Cherokee tribe.<sup>56</sup>

The main reason that I disagree with this story being a family legend is that it is so close to her. The woman that Pearl thinks is a Native American is her grandmother. It seems that she should not have false knowledge about her grandmother, as her mother would be able to correct this knowledge. It also makes sense that Susan should know whether or not her own mother was a Native American. Because of this, it seems that my family has a classic case of the Cherokee Princess Myth. During Pearl's lifetime, it became very popular to claim Native American

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<sup>53</sup> While possible, this seems to be unlikely as my grandmother has written that the tools came from Susan. On this paper she also implies that they came from the Sageser side of the family, however I have no way of validating this and cannot ask her why she thought this.

<sup>54</sup> After all of the other questions I have discovered along the way, I no longer feel that this is anywhere near to the most important one.

<sup>55</sup> At the time, she thought they lived in the same area of Ohio where we still are today. She did not know that Mariam was actually born in Fayette County, Kentucky, an area that was actually been inhabited, although not during the time that the Sageser's lived there.

<sup>56</sup> Kay Rhodus. Sageser/ Tevebaugh Family Stories. Interview by author. February 7, 2016.

ancestry. This is believed to be a way of absolving guilt for what their ancestors did to the Native Americans. The idea is that by claiming ancestry, an individual was able to show that they were not like the terrible early Americans who eradicated the native populations. When this happened, it was almost always a claim of Cherokee and she was almost always a princess, even though there is no such thing as a princess in Native American culture.<sup>57</sup> It is possible that Pearl could have done this herself, and bought the tools to back up this story.

Another common interpretation of the Cherokee Princess Myth is that the woman was referred to as native in order to hide the fact that she was actually African American. In the United States during the 1800s it was much better to be a Native American than it was to be a black, and thus if an interracial marriage occurred, everyone was told that she was a Native American to avoid the scandal.<sup>58</sup> This was especially of issue in the slaveholding families of middle Kentucky from which Mariam and John came. However, this does not appear to be the case in my family as there is also no trace of African ancestry in my DNA.<sup>59</sup> Also, looking at photographs of Mariam and other Sageser ancestors, they seem to all be light skinned.<sup>60</sup> Census records also show the Sageser family as being wealthy and slave owning, thus not African American themselves.

The final usage of Cherokee Princess is as a derogatory term. This is the usage that I am leaning towards the most, considering the probable animosity towards Mariam by Susan, who

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<sup>57</sup> Rayna Green, "The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe," *Folklore*, Volume 99, Number 1 (1988), 45-47, [http://www.jstor.org.proxy.bsu.edu/stable/pdf/1259567.pdf?\\_id=1459465177761](http://www.jstor.org.proxy.bsu.edu/stable/pdf/1259567.pdf?_id=1459465177761) (accessed March 12, 2016).

<sup>58</sup> Rayna Green, "The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe," *Folklore*, Volume 99, Number 1 (1988), 45-47, [http://www.jstor.org.proxy.bsu.edu/stable/pdf/1259567.pdf?\\_id=1459465177761](http://www.jstor.org.proxy.bsu.edu/stable/pdf/1259567.pdf?_id=1459465177761) (accessed March 12, 2016).

<sup>59</sup> *Ancestry DNA Ethnicity Estimate for Carrie Rhodus*. <http://dna.ancestry.com/ethnicity/6985BB2D-8E4E-40FD-991B-AA1EA2BA9FB7> (accessed January 17, 2016).

<sup>60</sup> Photograph Collection of Sageser ancestors, various years, various locations. In possession of Carrie Wolf, Amelia, Ohio.



could have called her mother this term in front of Pearl. Pearl was most likely to have taken this term in the literal meaning and assumed that her grandma was an actual Cherokee Princess. This statement was further solidified in her mind by the presence of the tools, which she most likely assumed came from her grandmother.

The reasoning for calling her mother a Cherokee Princess in a derogatory manner is still up for debate. It is possible that Mariam could have been a black sympathizer. If the family really did split up due to the Civil War, it is possible that because of this her former husband referred to her as a Cherokee Princess in order to imply that she was actually black herself, instead of just in sympathy. This could also fall back to the issue of Susan marrying an Irishman. Susan could have lashed out on her mother for not supporting one minority group by calling her a member of another.

Finally, Mariam could have been referred to as a Cherokee Princess simply because she seems to have been around Native Americans. Others could have viewed this as a problem, as racism towards Native Americans was still strong. Others that disapproved of Mariam's interactions with Native Americans could have given this name to her and she appropriated it onto herself in order to give it a positive spin and show that others negativity did not affect how she chose to live her life.

Although this project has left me with more questions than answers, I still feel that I have made major progress in discovering who Mariam Sageser was. I have a much more thorough understanding her life and family. I also now understand more of why we know so little about this woman. I have many possible theories as to basis of the stories that I have heard about her, as well as the ability to share with my family the reasoning as to why these stories are not true.

Most importantly, through the effort I have put into discovering just who this woman was, I am insuring that she will be remembered for at least another generation.



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